Amendments to the Claim:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1-5 (cancelled).

6 (currently amended). A pyruvate formate-lyase (Pfl) defective mutant lactic acid bacterium selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus* species, *Pediococcus* species, *Streptococcus* species and *Bifidobacterium* species, said bacterium having, relative to the wild-type strain from which it is derived, at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) essentially the same growth rate when cultivated under aerobic conditions in M17 medium,

(ii) a reduced growth rate or a reduced rate of acid production when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM),

(iii) essentially no production of formate under the anaerobic conditions of (ii),

(iv) a reduced production of ethanol or acetate under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RMS) and/or

(v) an increased production of at least one α-acetolactate-derived metabolite when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in RSM,

said mutant bacterium being obtainable by a method comprising the steps of

(1) providing a wild-type lactic acid bacterial strain having a functional Pfl gene, and selected from the group

consisting of *Lactococcus* species, *Pediococcus* species, *Streptococcus* species and *Bifidobacterium* species, which under aerobic conditions is not capable of growth in the absence of acetate in a medium not containing lipoic acid, but which is capable of growth in such medium under anaerobic conditions, and

(2) selecting a mutant obtainable by spontaneous mutation and/or at least one mutagenization treatment selected from the group consisting of chemical mutagen and ultraviolet light treatment, from said wild-type strain, ~~a mutant~~ which mutant under said conditions essentially does not grow in the absence of acetate.

7 (original). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 6 which has a production of acetoin which is increased by at least 100%.

8 (cancelled).

9 (previously presented). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 30 which is a *Lactococcus lactis*.

10 (original). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 9 which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* and *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis*.

11 (currently amended). A lactic acid bacterium according to claim 10 which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN221 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11034, a strain having all of the characteristics of DSM 11034, *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* biovar *diacetylactis* strain DN227 deposited under the accession No. DSM 11040 and a strain having all of the characteristics of DSM 11040.

12-26 (cancelled).

27 (original). A lactic acid bacterial starter culture

composition comprising a lactic acid bacterium of claim 6.

28-29 (cancelled).

30 (previously presented). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 6 which is a *Lactococcus* species.

31 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 6 which is selected from the group consisting of *Lactococcus* species *Pediococcus* species and *Bifidobacterium* species.

32 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 6 which is a *Pediococcus* species.

33 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 6 which is a *Bifidobacterium* species.

34 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 6 wherein the mutant of (2) is obtainable by ethyl methane sulfonate treatment of said wild-type strain.

35 (new). A pyruvate formate-lyase (Pfl) defective lactic acid bacterium which is

(I) *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN221 deposited under the accession number DSM 11034,

(II) *Lactococcus lactis* subspecies *lactis* strain DN227 deposited under the accession number DSM 11040,

(III) a mutant obtained by mutation of strain DN221, or

(IV) a mutant obtained by mutation of strain DN227,

said bacterium having, relative to the wild-type strain from which it is derived, at least one of the following characteristics:

(i) essentially the same growth rate when cultivated under aerobic conditions in M17 medium,

(ii) a reduced growth rate or a reduced rate of acid production when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RSM),

(iii) essentially no production of formate under the

anaerobic conditions of (ii),

(iv) a reduced production of ethanol or acetate under anaerobic conditions in M17 medium or in reconstituted skim milk (RMS) and/or

(v) an increased production of at least one α-acetolactate-derived metabolite when cultivated under anaerobic conditions in RSM.

36 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 35 wherein the mutants (III) and (IV) are derived from (I) and (II), respectively, solely by one or more spontaneous, chemically-induced, and/or ultraviolet light-induced mutations.

37 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 35 which is (I) or (II).

38 (new). The lactic acid bacterium of claim 35 which is (III) or (IV).